A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING

AT

VVHITE-HALL,

January *xxiij.* 167$\frac{5}{6}$.

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2 Cor. 2. 11.

Leſt Satan ſhould get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

THere can be no greater evidence of the weakneſs and degeneracy of the human Underſtanding, than that the Minds of Men are ſo eaſily impos'd upon, in Matters of the greateſt moment, and that with ſhews and phantaſtick Images of things, and ſuffer themſelves to be led aſide by little Arts of Sophiſtry

and Inſinuation into paths immediately deſtructive both of their Nature and their Happineſs. Wiſdom and Folly are not ſo much to be meaſured by their reſpect to the petty affairs of the preſent ſtate, as by the ſtandard of Eternity, and the regard they bear to what unqueſtionably are our higheſt Intereſts, the concernments of another World. We are wont with a very quick ſagacity to eſpy and decline a preſent evil, and with great ſollicitude to countermine the ſubtilties of an Adverſary that makes an attempt upon our Lives or Fortunes; and yet in the mean time can be ſupine and careleſs in the midſt of Enemies, whoſe deſigns reach beyond the preſent Life, and ſecurely walk over ſnares that are laid to ruin us forever.

Being therefore placed in ſuch dangerous and unhappy circumſtances, nothing can be more prudent and reaſonable, than that we ſhould dwell at home, and keep our active and diſcerning Faculties wakeful and vigilant, *leſt Satan ſhould get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

That there is a Fraternity and Combination of wicked and apoſtate Powers, ſpread up and down the World, which envy the happineſs of Mankind, and ſeek by all imaginable ways to undo them, is not only a Truth which the Holy

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Scriptures do frequently and expreſly declare and publiſh, but whereof the wiſer and more inquiſitive part of the *Gentile* World were ſufficiently ſenſible, it being τῶν πάνυ παλαιῶν λόγος (as *Plutarch* tells us) *one of their moſt ancient Traditions, that there were wicked and malignant Dæmons, that envied good men, oppoſed their actions, and ſtrove to hinder them in the purſuit of Virtue, leſt continuing firm and ſtedfaſt in a good courſe, they ſhould after death be more happy than themſelves*: And elſewhere he tells us, 'twas the aſſertion of *Xenocrates*, that *the whole Aery Region is filled with mighty and potent Beings, ſurly and ill-natured, which rejoyce in doing miſchief, and never reſt 'till they have compaſſed their deſigns.* A character that agrees exactly with the account which the Divine Oracles give us of theſe envious and malicious Spirits, that they *walk to and fro throughout the earth*, and go up and down from place to place, *ſeeking reſt, but finding none*, the chief of whom is *the Prince of the Power of the Air, the Spirit that worketh in the children of diſobedience*, ὁ ἀντίδικος, the Nature that's oppoſite to all Virtue and Goodneſs, *the adverſary the Devil, who as a roaring Lion walks about, ſeeking whom he may devour*; and what he cannot carry by force, he effects by ſubtilty, planting ſnares in every place, whereby the Sinner is *taken captive by him at his will.*

In vit. *Dion.* p. 958. non longè ab init.

De *Iſid.* & *Oſir.* p. 361. tom. 2.

Now

Now that *Satan* may not get an advantage of us, either through ignorance of his devices, or want of consideration to attend them, it may not possibly be unuseful to enquire into, and examin some of the more successful methods and trains of temptation, whereby the great Enemy of Souls is wont to blow up Mens resolutions for Religion and a holy Life, for I take it for granted, that most Men at one time or another entertain serious thoughts about these matters, whose resolutions perhaps might ripen into a kindly and generous piety, were they not stifled by the early snares and policies of the Tempter, whose devices are various and infinite; amongst which, these four or five I conceive may principally challenge our consideration; a secret disbelief of the truth of things, unjust representations of Religion, a placing all Religion in a few empty and external pretensions to piety and holiness, a compliance with such Vices as have a shadow and resemblance of Virtue, and the powerful influence of prevalent Examples. By which, amongst many others, Mens religious purposes are struck dead, at least the edge and force of their Endeavours is taken off, and all our perswasives to Piety and Virtue are rendered improsperous and unsuccessful.

I. And first, Men are too often carried off from

from the paths of Virtue and Religion, by a ſecret disbelief of the truth of things, by giving way to doubts and ſcruples about ſome lighter and leſs important matters, whereby they are by degrees prepared to queſtion the greater and more fundamental Principles, the Notion of a Deity, and the expectations of another Life. When *Satan* attempted our firſt Parents, he began the aſſault with a *peradventure*, poſſibly God had not ſaid ſo, or would not be ſo ſevere as He had threatened; by which means he unſettled their Belief of the Divine Truth and Veracity, and having blown up this Fort, quickly made a breach for the whole Temptation to enter in. The firſt approaches of impiety are modeſt and baſhful, Men do not uſually commence Atheiſts at one leap, but ſuffer themſelves firſt to be entangled in ſome nice ſceptical diſſatisfactions, which in time grow up into a more ſtubborn and poſitive infidelity. And then how ordinary is it to hear ſuch Men, more than whiſper their Sentiments to this effect; that all Religion is but a trick of Art, a notion ſtarted by the fears of Men, hatch'd at firſt by ſome jealous Mind, or contrived by ſome crafty Sateſmen, to keep the World in peace and order; that the exiſtence of a ſupreme Being is but a dreadful and melancholy fancy, and the inviſible terrours of another World but painted flames,

flames, kindled in the warm brain of ſome devout and pious Preacher; that a future ſtate is but a precarious notion, and that there is no reaſon to believe what is at ſo vaſt a diſtance from us; that Good and Evil are but titular and imaginary things, founded only νόμῳ καὶ ἔθει (as *Pyrrho* the *Sceptic* affirmed of old) in cuſtom and human conſtitutions. The Author of the *Book of Wiſdom* fitly expreſſes the inward ſenſe of theſe Men, when he brings them in thus venting of their minds: *Our life is ſhort and tedious, and in the death of a man there is no remedy, neither was there any man known to have returned from the grave; for we are born at all adventure, and we ſhall be hereafter as if we had never been: for the breath in our noſtrils is as ſmoke, and a little ſpark in the moving of our heart, which being extinguiſhed, our body ſhall be turned into aſhes, and ſpirit ſhall vaniſh as the ſoft air; and our name ſhall be forgotten in time, and no man ſhall have our works in remembrance; for our time is a very ſhadow that paſſeth away, and after our end there is no returning, for it is faſt ſealed, ſo that no man comes again.*

D Laert. l. 9. in vit. *Pyrrh.* p. 670.

Wiſd. 2. 1, &c.

This certainly is that γηγενὴς ψυχὴ, which the *Son* of *Syrach* ſpeaks of, that bold daring temper, that makes light of whatever is ſacred, and inſolently affronts Omnipotence it ſelf. And when once Men have come thus far, to trample Religion under foot, they clap their wings, & *nos*

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exequat victoria cœlo, as their Champion *Lucretius* begins the Triumph; and then 'tis kindneſs and modeſty, if they go no farther, and make not that, for which all Mankind beſides themſelves have ſo juſt a reverence and veneration, the object of their ſcorn and laughter, and the ſport of a wanton and a ſcurrilous wit. From ſuch Principles as theſe what can be expected, but the height of looſeneſs and extravagance, and that Mens Lives ſhould be anſwerable to their Creed? And accordingly the ſame Author repreſents them by a logick natural enough, arguing at this rate in the very words that follow: *Come on therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are preſent, let us ſpeedily uſe the creatures as in youth: let us fill our ſelves with coſtly wine and ointments, and let no flower of the graſs ſpring by us: let none of us go without his part of voluptuouſneſs, let us leave tokens of our joyfulneſs in every place; for this is our portion and our lot. Let us oppreſs the poor righteous man, let us not ſpare the widow, nor reverence the ancient gray hairs of the aged, let our ſtrength be the law of Juſtice; let us lye in wait for the righteous, and examin him with deceitfulneſs and torture, that we may know his meekneſs, and prove his patience, and let us condemn him with a ſhameful death. Theſe things* (ſays he) *they did imagin, and as for the myſteries of God they knew them not, neither hoped they for the wages of righteouſneſs, nor diſcerned a reward for blameleſs ſouls.*

Such are the Inferences, that naturally flow from the Articles of the Epicures and the Atheists Creed. The folly and absurdness whereof I shall not endeavour to expose, themselves would not be content that they should be pursued to their proper issues. For were Conscience once discharged from the obligations of Religion, they could not reasonably hope to be one minute secure and undisturbed in their beloved Pleasures and Possessions, but that the longest Sword and the strongest Arm would soon put in a claim for the biggest share. Indeed I am loth to think so ill of human Nature, as to believe, however the temptation may succeed with a few, that any considerable part of Mankind should fall under so black a charge. There is a natural sense of God impressed upon the Minds of Men, Principles born and bred up with us, and which freely bear witness to God and Goodness, which may for a time be suppressed and laid a sleep, but can hardly by any arts be so choaked and stifled, but that upon every occasion this vital Principle will awake, start up and betray it self. When therefore the subtil Agent finds this Engin too weak to prevail, at least on the generality of Mankind, he has another at hand, to keep them off from engaging in a sober and a virtuous course, and that is

II. Secondly, by making false and undue repre-

repreſentations of Religion, by dreſſing it up in ſo unlovely a garb, as ſhall fright Men from the embraces of it: When he cannot prevail with Men to doubt of the truth, he will perſwade them to queſtion the goodneſs and equity of Religion. And a twofold artifice is commonly made uſe of, to prejudice Religion in the Minds of Men, that its reſtraints are unjuſt and unreaſonable, and that the commands of it are difficult or impoſſible.

Firſt, Religion is look'd upon as a tyrannical Incroachment upon the natural Rights and Priviledges of Mankind, as laying unjuſt and unreaſonable reſtraints upon Men, ſuch as enſlave our free born faculties, confine our native appetites, and tye us up from all agreeable pleaſures and delights; that we cannot be good, but we muſt ceaſe to be Men, nor embrace Religion, but we muſt put off humanity; that certainly God never intended His Laws ſhould be an oppreſſion and a torment to Mankind, nor ever gave them ſuch vaſt appetites and deſires, or furniſhed the Creation with ſuch variety of beautiful and grateful Objects, meerly to tantalize their deſires; that it's in vain to talk of freedom and liberty, when we are bound up by the Laws of Juſtice and Righteouſneſs, that we muſt not exert our power, though never ſo convenient an advantage be offered to greaten and enrich our ſelves;

when we cannot ſecurely gratifie our inclinations with thoſe pleaſures, that are acceptable to our ſenſes and our appetites, but Religion muſt interpoſe, with the precepts of Sobriety and Chaſtity, Temperance and Moderation, to control and interrupt us.

But if this Temptation ſignifie any thing, it pleads for an univerſal exemption from all Laws, there being no Law without a reſtraint, and then what becomes of Obedience to natural Parents or civil Powers? what of our Obligations to God as our great Parent and Benefactor? The Laws of our Creature-ſhip and dependance do neceſſarily and indiſpenſibly ſubject us to God as our Creator, and we can as ſoon ceaſe to be Creatures, as become independent: And if any reſtraints be neceſſary and allowable, what can be more fit and comely, than thoſe which Religion lays upon us? ſo proper and agreeable to our Natures, ſo conducive to our Intereſt, ſo neceſſary to the Peace and Happineſs of the World, that were they generally thrown off, particular Perſons and publick Societies would be immediately hurried into diſorder and a *Chaos*, and Mankind become like a Forreſt of wild Beaſts, equally ſavage, and mutually deſtructive of one another. Nor are we debarred any delights and ſatisfactions, but what are vicious and irregular, diſho-

diſhonourable and deſtructive to our Natures, and a diſparagement both to our Religion and our Reaſon, and the abſtaining from which does immediately conduce to make us happy. But it's repreſented

Secondly, to the diſadvantage of Religion, that the Precepts of it are difficult, if not impoſſible; that it *binds upon us heavy burthens and grievous to be born*, and what it commands is *an hard ſaying, and who can bear it?* eſpecially in our fallen and degenerate ſtate, which has laid us under ſo much weakneſs and impotency, that conſidering the neceſſary and unavoidable infirmities of our Nature, 'tis no great wonder if we do ſlip and fall; when we cannot rectifie what is crooked, nor have ſtrength enough to bear up againſt the ſtream that comes full upon us. *Can the Leopard change his ſpots? or the* Ethiopian *waſh white his skin?* If God deſigned we ſhould lead an innocent and ſpotleſs life, why did He not reform and mend the Faculties of the Soul, or render it incapable to prevaricate and ſin againſt Him? *Nay but, O man! who art thou that replieſt againſt God? Shall the thing formed ſay to him that formed it, why haſt thou made me thus? God made man upright, and himſelf ſought out many inventions.* Nor even in the preſent ſtate wherein we are, does God require any thing of us that is impoſſible.

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His Law is holy, just, and good; His *yoke is easie, and his burthen light*; *His commandements are not grievous*, but that *whoever is born of God overcomes the world*. He is not wanting to render our Duty easie to us; He encourages our hopes with the promises of an infinite reward, and by the threatenings of a future and intolerable vengeance, awakens our fears to a due care and caution. He assists our infirmities with a strength proportionable to our weakness, and the necessities of our state; so that though the temptations that assault us be strong and mighty, yet *greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world*: The Grace and Spirit of God are an unconquerable Principle, for which no command can be too hard or heavy, and these God is always ready to afford, and never withdraws from any, 'till by a long train and course of impiety, and many wilful and obstinate refusals, they have forfeited the aids of Divine Grace, and rendered themselves unworthy of it. Besides that, there are few difficulties in Religion, but what our own folly have made to be so, and those that are, as 'tis in all Arts and Institutions, are worst at first, which being once broken and conquered, the main difficulties of a Religious Life are overcome, and every step of the way after becomes more pleasant and delightful.

III. Another artifice, by which *Satan* is wont

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to obſtruct real piety and a good life, is by tempting Men to place all Religion in a few empty and external pretenſions to piety and holineſs, devoid of the inward life and ſpirit of Religion. Some kind of Religion moſt Men are for, in ſpite of all the projects and deſigns of Hell, which becauſe *Satan* cannot hinder, he'll take care it ſhall be ſuch, as ſhall do them little good; and Men are forward enough to comply with that, which bids faireſt to carry them to Heaven upon the cheapeſt terms. And hence it is, that inſtead of a ſincere and ſubſtantial piety, an inward ſubjection of the Soul to God, and a conformity of the Life to the eternal Laws of Truth and Goodneſs, they generally take up in a looſe profeſſion, in a few ſlighty obſervances, and ſuperficial formalities of Devotion. This is too ſadly viſible among the ſeveral pretending parties to Religion in the World. Some there are, whoſe beſt title to Religion, is the accommodating themſelves to ſome particular mode of adminiſtration, that they have joyned themſelves to this Mans Church, or that Mans Congregation, and are warm and active to eſpouſe and promote the Intereſts of a little Tribe or Faction. Others ſpend their zeal for the Orthodoxy of their private and particular Notions and Opinions, regardleſs at the ſame time of Love and Charity, the good of the Church,

Church, and the peace of the World, without which all our clamour is but a blind and intemperate zeal, a bitter and unwarrantable paſſion, conſecrated by a more venerable Name. There are, that pleaſe themſelves with the number and frequency of their Devotions, pray much, and hear often, and ſo far 'tis well; but then never regard with what honeſty of mind, and ſprightly vivacity of affection, their Incenſe is offered up; nay poſſibly reckon into the bargain, that the cuſtomary diſcharge of theſe ſhall redeem their credit with Heaven, for all the miſcarriages of their lives. The *Scribes* and *Phariſes*, above all the Sects in the *Jewiſh* Church, entit'led themſelves to the higheſt ſtrictneſſes and ſeverities of Religion, faſted at every turn, gave alms twice a week, prayed in every corner of the ſtreets, and ſome of them did almoſt nothing elſe but pray; and yet theſe grave and demure pretenders, made uſe of theſe only as a cloak to cover their malice and ill nature, their rapine and violence, and the greateſt villany and oppreſſion; they prayed to God, and at the ſame time *robbed the Orphan and devoured Widows houſes, tythed mint, anniſe, and cummin*, and *neglected judgment, mercy, and fidelity, the greater and weightier matters of the Law.*

How great a part of the Chriſtian World is trained up in meer outward forms and ritual ſervices,

ſervices, in eaſie devotions and cheap performances, is too notorious to inſiſt upon. When the main of a Chriſtians Duty ſhall be reckoned to conſiſt in a few *bodily exerciſes*, and corporal ſeverities, in numbering over a ſet of prayers, which the Votary it may be does neither mind, nor is capable to underſtand. When one act of contrition, an eaſie or a trifling pennance, a ſhort confeſſion, and an abſolution, ſhall be thought enough, even in the *article of death*, to put a Man into a ſtate of ſalvation, and to ſecure his happineſs in another world. Repentance, alas! is the great buſineſs of a Man's Life, and is then ſincere and effectual to the purpoſes of Religion, when 'tis attended with a real and a hearty reformation; and without this, ten thouſand Indulgences cannot profit him, nor all the Abſolutions in the world relieve the Conſcience of a guilty Sinner. *Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of Rams? or ten thouſands of Rivers of Oyl? He hath ſhewed thee, O man! what is good, and what the Lord doth require of thee, to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.* The ſumm is this: Religion is an inward and a vital Principle, a conſtant ſpring of uniform and entire Obedience, that lyes not in forms and ſhews, in ſubtilties and diſputes, in *Schemes* of ſpeech, or *Syſtems* of opinions, in glorious pretences, or Mich. 6. 7, 8.

being of a Sect or Party, but in a divine life, in a great love to God, and a veneration of his Perfections, a dread of his Power, and a reverence for his Laws, in the mortification of our passions, and the subjection of our irregular desires, in being meek and humble, compassionate and charitable, just and righteous: It is not an art of speaking finely, but of living well, *Not every one that sayeth, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doth the Will of my Father that is in Heaven*: 'Tis the participation of a Divine Nature, and a conformity to the Image of God, the *keeping a conscience void of offence, both towards God and men.* And whoever takes up short of this, sits down in the porch, and contents himself with a *name to live*, and may have Religion enough to make him an Hypocrite, but not truly to entitle him to be a Christian. *The Kingdom of God is not meats and drinks*, it is not to be exact and curious, as the *Jews* were, about abundance of little observances, and ritual devotions, *but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

Mat. 7. 21.

Rom. 14. 17.

IV. *Fourthly*, *Satan* too often prevails upon Men, by tempting them to such Vices, as have a shadow and resemblance of Virtue. The politick and crafty Spirit knows very well, that Sin is of so black a nature, that it will never take, especially

cially with the more ſober and conſidering ſort of Men, in its own naked ſhape, and therefore dreſſes it up in a better garb, and calls it by another name. Few Men but would recoil and ſtart at a down-right temptation to murder, but when 'tis whetted by revenge, and ſet off as the maintaining our reputation and our honour, it goes down readily without control. *Caiphas* 'tis like had no perſonal pique and quarrel at our bleſſed Saviour, when he adviſed the *Sanhedrim* to cut him off; but he did it under the ſpecious notion of a common good, and the publick ſecurity of the Nation. How came *Satan* to actuate St. *Paul* with a ſpirit of ſo much bitterneſs and animoſity, ſuch a furious and paſſionate ſpleen, againſt the primitive Believers, but only that he perſwaded him, that the Glory of God, and the Honour of his Religion, did ſo deeply lye at ſtake? What makes Avarice ſpread ſo far, and that with many, otherwiſe high pretenders to Religion, but becauſe it aſſumes to it ſelf the plauſible pretext of a laudable diligence and frugality, and a commendable care to make proviſion for our ſelves and families, warranted and enjoyned by the Laws of Nature and Religion? And under the ſhadow of this, the Tempter leads Men into all the extravagant irregularities, into which a greedy and rapacious Mind is capable to betray

them. Pride never ſpreads its plumes with more ſucceſs, than when 'tis recommended as a piece of neatneſs and gentility, and a juſt valuing of our ſelves according to our deſert and quality. Many a Man would never be betrayed into the exceſſes of riot and intemperance, did he not look upon it as an argument of a free generous mind, and a piece of innocent good fellowſhip and ſociety. And thus *Satan* very ſucceſsfully leads Men into *works of darkneſs*, by appearing to them as an *Angel of light*, and puts off his temptations under the notion, either of what is virtuous, or at leaſt what is uſeful and lawful to them.

V. I ſhall mention but one art and *ſtratagem* more, whereby this great Enemy recommends his temptations with advantage to us, and that is, by improving the influence of powerful and prevalent Examples. Mankind is of a ſociable and pliant temper, eaſily drawn aſide with the moſt, eſpecially with *a multitude to do evil*, becauſe the byas of corrupt Nature runs that way. We are apt to look upon it as ſome kind of ſhelter and patronage, to ſin in company, where every one bears his ſhare of the guilt and ſhame, and ſo it ſeems leſs by being divided, like a great Stream that is cut into little Rivulets. Example is a mighty argument, and one of *Satan's*

moſt

most effectual snares, and which many times, without great care and resolution, there is no way to avoid; for the corruption of manners, has I know not how introduced a kind of necessity, of doing as the company does wherein we are, and to refuse it, is look'd upon as a trespass against the Laws of Civility and good Manners, and the Man accounted either a Clown or an Hypocrite, that will not venture as far as the rest, and *run with them into the same excess of riot.*

And the force of the temptation is so much the stronger, by how much those whom we follow, are persons for whom we have a more peculiar esteem and veneration, or by whom we have been obliged, as our Benefactors. We have a natural regard and reverence for our betters, and are prone to imitate them by an implicit Faith. The vulgar part of Mankind look upon their Superiours, that as they stand under higher and stronger obligations to Virtue and Piety, so they are furnished with happier advantages of understanding the true natures and differences of things, than other Men, and accordingly from them are apt to take the common measures of good or evil, and to defend themselves with the warrant and authority of those that are above them. The Examples of Great Men give Laws to conversation,

ſation, and are able to add a reputation either to Vice or Virtue, and one ſuch inſtance ſhall ſooner prevail with Men to ſet upon thoſe things that are *juſt and pure, lovely and of good report*, than an hundred arguments ſhall perſwade them: As, on the other hand, Vice is never more fatally proſperous and ſucceſsful, than when it has the patronage of great Examples to recommend it.

By theſe few Inſtances, we ſee the lot and portion of the preſent ſtate, what ſnares and *ſtratagems*, what policies and devices, we are expoſed to on every ſide, what troops of temptations are round about us; that therefore it concerns us to ſtand continually upon our guard, to keep our conſiderations awake, to preſerve our conſciences quick and tender, to be infinitely watchful, that our foot be not taken in any of thoſe ſnares, that are purpoſely laid to ruin us, not only in this, but (which is unconceivably of more importance) in the other life. For a courſe of impiety, has not only a fatal and malignant influence upon the affairs of the preſent ſtate, it does not only tend to conſume the eſtate, or blaſt the reputation, or waſte the body, diſtract and torment the mind, and render every condition troubleſome and uneaſie, theſe, alas! are *but the beginning of ſorrows*, in reſpect of that portion of miſery, that awaits the Sinner in the future

future ſtate, when the wrath and diſpleaſure of the Almighty ſhall finally overtake him, and *come upon him to the uttermoſt.* For the other World is the proper ſcene and ſtage, whereon the Divine Juſtice ſhall ride in triumph in the executions of its vengeance; when Conſcience ſhall be let looſe with all its ſtings, and perpetually prey upon it ſelf; when the remembrances of an ill-ſpent life, and the ſad reflections upon its paſt ſins and pleaſures, ſhall be always preſſing in upon it, and the Soul unable either to deny or ſhift off the evidence; when nothing ſhall be able to mitigate the grief, or to beguile the ſenſe of it; when there ſhall be no raviſhing objects, external pleaſures, no muſical Airs, or boon Companions, to charm Conſcience aſleep again, no intermitting fits of eaſe, but the Soul groaning under perpetual paroxyſms of rage and terrour.

The conſideration whereof, ought to allarm our fears, that if there be any care of our ſelves, any ſerious regards of our eternal ſtate, we may be wiſe in time, before it be too late, *recover our ſelves out of the ſnare of the Devil,* and become *ſober and vigilant; becauſe our adverſary goes about, ſeeking whom he may devour.* 'Tis no contemptible Enemy that we have to deal with, nor the leſs to be feared becauſe inviſible, nay 'tis this renders him more capable of ſucceeding in his attempts upon

upon us; for by this means he maintains a nearer and more ſecret intercourſe with the Spirits of Men, makes more undiſcerned and inſenſible approaches, and ſtorms the walls before we are aware: He is admirably acute and ſubtil, to plant his engins, to make his batteries in the weakeſt part, he narrowly obſerves our tempers and conſtitutions, our fears and ſcruples, our diſpoſitions and inclinations, and accordingly adapts his temptations to us with moſt ſucceſs, *Ut cujuſque ſtudium ex ætate flagrabat*, as the Hiſtorian remarques concerning the Arts of *Catalin*, in every period of life he furniſhes Men with what is moſt agreeable to their age and temper.

Salluſt. de Bell. Catal. c. 14. p. 32.

But, alas! though Men had no foreign Enemy from without to make war upon them, though there were no ſubtil Tempter to ſeduce them, there is an Enemy within their own breaſts, that lays trains to ruin them; their own corrupt and vicious inclinations ſet open the door, and hurry them forth to meet the temptation that's coming towards them: *Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt, and enticed.* Herein lyes *Satans* great advantage, he knows our ſtrength is ſmall, our propenſions to ſin impetuous and violent, and how apt we are to be betrayed by our appetites and paſſions. All external Objects, though never ſo raviſhing and delightful, could make

Jam. 1. 14.

make no impreſſion, were there not a party within, that's falſe to the true intereſts of the Soul. *Satan*, as potent and crafty as he is, cannot raviſh our wills, nor force our inclinations; the worſt he can do, is to prompt and perſwade, to watch advantages, and adminiſter ſuitable ſollicitations, but cannot compel us to entertain them. No Man is undone, but himſelf is the cauſe on't, he that would not, cannot be overcome, provided he keep his reſolutions fix'd and ſtedfaſt. This is the true way of conqueſt and victory over *Satan*, *reſiſt the Devil, and he will flye from you*; if we do but make good our ground, his temptations will vaniſh and diſappear. Jam. 4. 7.

Let us then treaſure up in our Minds a great ſenſe of God and of our ſelves, let us ſuffer Conſcience freely to diſcharge its duty, and *have our ſenſes exerciſed to diſcern betwixt good and evil.* Let us reverence the greatneſs and nobility of our Natures, which are of a more Divine frame and temper, than to be proſtituted and defiled. There's no real Evil in this World but Sin, other things may be evil to us, but that's evil in it ſelf: There's an eternal and unalterable deformity in its nature, which no plauſible pretences can wipe off: As Virtue and Goodneſs are in themſelves lovely and excellent, ſo Wickedneſs is eſſentially vile and baſe.

Let all opportunities and occasions of Vice be avoided, with a quick and a jealous care; a temptation is easilier prevented, than removed, when once it has thrust it self upon the Sinner. 'Tis good to suspect lawful things: Men cannot safely use their utmost liberty; he that will go just as far as he may, 'tis no wonder if he be tempted to go further than he ought. Whatever is lawful, may not be expedient, especially when 'tis likely to be abused unto excess. Security is treacherous and unfaithful; where no immediate danger is apprehended, care is usually laid aside, and liberty degenerates into licentiousness. *Blessed is he that feareth always*, that chuses rather to sit down short, and to deny himself in some warrantable satisfactions, than presume to venture to the end of his line. 'Tis hard to distinguish the utmost bounds, and the nice limits between good and evil, and therefore safest to keep within what's evidently fit and lawful. Prov. 23. 1, 2. *When thou sittest to eat with a Ruler* (says the Wise Man) *put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite*; that is, be exceeding wary, and govern thine appetite by the severest measures of sobriety, because excess, at such a time, is much readier to steal upon us, than when a temptation to intemperance is with open face presented to us.

We should frequently review our lives, and call

call our actions to a ſevere and impartial examination, that we may know what is their ſpring and fountain, what their tendency and inclination, and what will be the conſequence and the iſſue of them; and that if *Satan* have conveyed in a ſuggeſtion in diſguiſe, we may pull off the vizor, and reſent it in its own form and ſhape. And this account ſhould be taken, as near as may be, upon the doing of every action, or as ſoon as ever the thoughts are freed from the preſent incumbrances that are upon them. The *Pythagoreans* were taught, thrice every night to call themſelves to an account for the actions of the preceding day; and *Sextius*, the Philoſopher, never uſed to go to bed, 'till he had firſt reaſoned and expoſtulated with himſelf, *What evil habit have I cured to day? what vice have I reſiſted? wherein am I better than I was before?* And certainly, would Chriſtians accuſtom themſelves more to this excellent courſe, they would quickly find a double advantage flow from it; that repentance, and the reforming of our lives, would be infinitely more eaſie and tolerable, and that our minds would be trained up to a greater warineſs and circumſpection, and to keep a more ſtrict and ſevere hand over our own lives and actions: Nothing being more inſtrumental to reſtrain impiety, and to promote virtue and a good life, than to bring the

Vid. Xpur. Inſt. n. 40. &c.

Senec. de Ira l. 3. c. 36. p. 87.

Com. in Aur. Carm. p. 209.

actions of every day πρὸς τὸ τῆς συνειδήσεως δικαστήριον, (as *Hierocles* expreſſes it) before the *Tribunal* of Conſcience, and to paſs a juſt and an unbyaſſed ſentence upon our ſelves.

This method once eſtabliſhed, would weaken the power of vicious habits, and withdraw the fewel that enflames the fire, 'twould ruin the party which the Enemy has within us. Men are commonly betrayed by thoſe of their own houſe, the Enemy maintains correſpondence with their inordinate appetites and inclinations, and by them ſurpriſes and pulls them down. Every irregular paſſion ſubdued and mortified, is a breach made up in the Soul, and leaves leſs hold for *Satan* to faſten his Engins and Deſigns upon it. But above all we muſt ſollicit Heaven, that God would enable us to defeat and diſappoint the plots and ſubtilties of the Tempter: *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:* Our Lord has made it part of our daily addreſs to Heaven, that God *would not lead*, that is, not ſuffer us to be lead *into temptation, but deliver us* ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ, from the power and prevalency of the Devil. He is too hard for us in our own ſtrength, but God has ſaid, *His Grace ſhall be ſufficient for us.* If we be ſincere and hearty in our ſtriving, we have an inviſible aid at hand, the aſſiſtance of God's Grace and Spirit, a ſupply infi-

infinitely beyond all the powers of *Satan*. Beſides, God is pleaſed to animate our Endeavours, and encourage our induſtry and perſeverance, with the promiſe of a mighty reward: *To him that overcomes, I will grant to ſit with me in my Throne, even as I alſo overcame, and am ſet down with my Father in his Throne.* Rev. 3. 21. The Wiſe and Good God does not oblige us to eternal labours, to grapple with endleſs difficulties and oppoſitions, there is a term and period fix'd to our preſent warfare, a time coming, when theſe tryals ſhall ceaſe, and our preſent troubles be ſwallowed up in infinite joys and pleaſures. What then remains? but that we *be ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*; that *we take unto our ſelves the whole armour of God*, and be thereby enabled *to ſtand againſt the wiles of the Devil; praying always with all prayer and ſupplication in the ſpirit, and watching thereunto with all perſeverance*; that after all the conflicts and difficulties of the preſent life, we may *be able to withſtand in the evil day, and having done all to ſtand.* Now *the God of all Grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by* Chriſt Jeſus, *make you perfect, ſtabliſh, ſtrengthen, ſettle you. To Him be Glory and Dominion for ever and ever.* AMEN.

FINIS.